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ABSTRACT

On the premise that union election campaigns on college campuses can provide useful lessons for public relations practitioners, this paper examines literature pertaining to organizing efforts in order to discover public relations problems that can be posed by the reciprocal nature of the influences between the internal and external audiences affected by such campaigns. Following a brief introduction, the paper (1) examines the reasons for studying faculty unionization attempts, (2) discusses the industrial relations term "multilateralism" and its place in educational bargaining, and (3) identifies internal and external publics and their interests in the bargaining process. The paper concludes that the permeable boundary between internal and external publics is the appropriate focal point for understanding such campaigns and, potentially, for better understanding other public relations situations, in particular those involving campaigns that must address both specific internal audiences and broad sectors of the general public. (Author/FL)

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PUBLIC RELATIONS PROBLEMS IN ADDRESSING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL AUDIENCES IN CAMPUS UNION ORGANIZING DRIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study employs the example of union organizing efforts on college and university campuses to investigate some of the public relations problems which can be posed by the reciprocal nature of the influences between internal and external audiences. It is concluded that the permeable boundary between internal and external publics is the appropriate focal point for understanding such campaigns, and, potentially, for better understanding other public relations situations, particularly those involving campaigns which must simultaneously address specific internal audiences and broad sectors of the general public in their role as electors.

Introduction

Attempts to define public relations are legion, but one common thread appears in many definitons, the notion that public relations is directed activity aimed at achieving some goal. In 1977 the Public Relations Society of America commissioned a committee, chaired by C. Thomas Wilck, to define public relations. The Wilck committee, after soliciting the opinions of many practitioners, included the notion of goal directed activity when it defined public relations as "The function that maintains an organization's relationships with society in a way that most effectively achieves the organization's goals" (Wilck, 1977, p. 26). Two of the most popular texts in the field also include the notion of goal directed activity when they define public relations as:

> "Public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends. (Cutlip & Center, 1985, p.4).

and:

> All activities and attitudes intended to judge, adjust to, influence and direct the opinion of any group or groups of persons in the interest of any individual, group or institution (Newsom & Scott, 1985, p. 503)

Because public relations can be viewed as an effort to achieve some goal through the use of communication the public relations perspective can be employed to study the specific class of persuasive communication campaigns known as union election campaigns. Conversely, union, or management, election campaigns on college campuses may provide some useful lessons for public relations practitioners in the interaction of internal and external publics .

This paper will first identify the reasons for studying faculty unionization attempts, tie-in the industrial relations literature on multilateralism in educational bargaining, identify internal and external publics and their interests, and finally argue that focusing on the interaction of internal and external publics best explains university union organizing drives and may provide a useful example for public relations practitioners in conducting campaigns intended to influence specific internal audiences and

broad sectors of the general public in their role as electors/taxpayers.

Unions on Campus

The American union movement is today suffering large losses. Labor is winning less than 50% of its certification elections, only 30% of its decertification elections (Urban, 1980), and labor itself admits that membership among those eligible to join a union has dwindled from a high of 45 percent in 1954 to a current 28 percent (AFL-CIO, 1985). Labor's figures correspond closely with government reports which place the percentage of the total labor force which is unionized at 19.7% (approximately 21,000,000 members), down from a high of 25 percent in 1956 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1980).

The trend in the public sector however is the inverse. From 1971 to 1983 AFL-CIO public sector membership grew by over 1,000,000 while private sector membership declined by 2,000,000 (AFL-CIO, 1985). One major contributor to the growth of unions in the public sector has been labor's outstanding success in organizing college campuses.

Campus union organizing efforts, and the questions which such efforts pose for public relations

practitioners, are a relatively recent phenomenon. As late as 1970 only fifteen four-year institutions, representing only 5,626 faculty, had been unionized (Dayal, 1982). By 1979 there were 133 organized four year institutions representing 86,000 faculty, more than 90% of which were employed at public universities (Lawler, 1982). By 1980 there were 100,000 organized faulty (Dayal, 1982), while by 1982 the April Chronicle of Higher Education reported 157,000 organized faculty as of January 1982.

The National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions has released a study, "Directory of Faculty Contracts and Bargaining Agents in Institutions of Higher Education" (Heller, 1985) indicating that today 36% of public college and university faculty are unionized while only 4.8% of private institution faculty are union members, due largely to the impact of the 1980 Yeshiva Supreme Court Decision. The National Center report also indicates that today about 25% of the 3,200 colleges and universities in the United States are unionized with 395 signed contracts covering 830 campuses. While the rate of growth in faculty unionism has been declining since about 1976 (Lawler, 1982), campus union organizing is still experiencing rapid growth as noted

above on the basis of the union succeeding in becoming a certified bargaining agent in four out of five, or 80%, of certification attempts (Chronicle, April 28, 1982; Dayal, 1982).

Lawler (1982) and others have suggested that the principle factor behind the growth of campus unionism is the passage of state labor laws, 24 of which specifically permit organizing of faculty. Since the passage of the Smith-McCarren Act (National Labor Relations Act or NLRA) of 1932 labor law in this country has been based on the principle of deciding the question of union representation by a secret ballot election. The fairness of such elections is protected by the constraints which are put upon the appeals by both sides to the electorate. These appeals are the campaign which the union, management, or both, conduct in an attempt to win a majority of the good votes cast to their side. While the role of the campaign in the ultimate success or failure of union organizing drives is not clear (Getman, Goldberg & Herman, 1976; Stephens & Timms, 1978) they are a key part of all industrial relations law and occur everywhere that unions seek bargaining rights, including on college and university campuses.

A public relations campaign is "An organized

effort to affect opinion of a group or groups on particular issues" (Newsom & Scott, 1985, p. 493). As persuasive campaigns in which both sides attempt to reach a goal through the use of various communication channels, strategies, and media, normally without the purchase of paid advertising space, organizing drives may be viewed as public relations campaigns. Because of the numbers of persons involved and the potential for indirect impact on public policy and education organizing campaigns on campuses are potentially important arenas of study for public relations researchers.

Multilateralism

This paper will use the term multilateralism to describe the organizing situation which unions, and administrations, face in collective bargaining campaigns on campuses. The label multilateralism has been used in many arenas, most frequently in industrial relations to describe collective bargaining situations with third (trilateralism), fourth, and even fifth party involvement. Kochan (1974) has defined multilateralism in industrial relations as, a process of negotiations in which more than two distinct parties are involved in such a way that a clear dichotomy

between employee and management organizations does not exist. Multilateralism, defined this way, is most often found in public sector, as opposed to private sector situations (Aussieker, 1975) and primarily in local government and education matters (Bornstein, 1980).

Multi-party bargaining situations grow out of contexts in which third parties have interests in the bargaining process. The interests which outside parties in multilateral bargaining share make them publics within the Newsom and Scott (1985) definition of a public as a group of people tied together by a common bond or interest.

The interests of outside parties do not suddenly occur when a contract is being bargained, but are the result of ongoing relationships (perceived or real) which the outside parties feel they have with the parties to the bargaining. For example, taxpayer groups may feel they have an interest in local government negotiations, groups of parents may feel that the interests of their children should come before the interests of teachers (Bornstein, 1980). Up through high school both taxpayers and parents groups have been found to be concerned about increases in taxes and/or cuts in service in other programs as a result of teacher unions getting raises for their members

(Rybacki & Rybacki, 1979), and are often vary unyielding in their demands on school systems (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1979). Because most college and university faculty organizing drives occur on campuses funded by public monies the same kinds of taxpayer and parental concerns can be expected to be raised by the affected groups.

There is a long history of multilateral bargaining in higher education. Garbarino (1975) has identified several instances of multilateral bargaining in public four year colleges including intervention by; governors, state legislators, state budgetary authorities, officials of the state higher education system, local governments, and even the rejection of provisions of a collectively bargained contract by a state legislature. Others have investigated the multilateral experiences of public sector faculty in two year institutions and found instances of; deferring bargaining responsibilities to local politicians, involvement of local government officials, end-run bargaining, pressure from community interest groups, state legislator interventions, higher body rejections of agreements, and unilateral implementation of agreements by higher bodies (Angell, 1973; Aussieker, 1974). Any and all of the interests which have

expressed themselves in multilateral bargaining could instead express themselves in exerting pressure in an organizing situation if they perceived their interests as greatly effected by the outcome.

Aussieker (1975) expects instances of multilateral bargaining in public higher education to continue and even become more frequent for two reasons. First, financial and administrative control of public higher education is dispersed among state and local governing boards, coordinating agencies, and legislative and executive bodies. Second, the appropriate faculty bargaining units for public higher education may not correspond to the negotiating unit boundaries that union and management representatives prefer as optimal for decision making and bargaining-power considerations.

McLennan and Moskow (1972) offered four guidelines for identifying third-party involvement. First, the outside groups in question must be in a position to impose cost -- economic, political, or otherwise on the parties to the agreement. Second, mediation and appeals from third parties do not constitute multilateral bargaining. Third, multilateralism arises from the needs of interest groups, such as users and taxpayers. Fourth:

> the topics of negotiation should affect the goals of interest groups, pursuit of the goals requires interest group participation, and union and management representatives should perceive this interest group involvement, though not necessarily its physical presence at the bargaining table (p. 232-33).

The analysis of both Aussieker and McLennan and Moscow with respect to multilateralism in bargaining apply to the organizing context on campuses. Many universities no longer have final administrative authority located on their own campus, system - wide, and even state - wide administrative authority is not rare, so response to organizing drives comes from many sources. Even where there is single campus administrative authority, it must be shared with state boards of higher education, legislative oversight committees, and representatives of governors or other political bodies who offer various legal and political responses to organizing drives. Additionally, there is little agreement on appropriate bargaining unit in campus drives, as illustrated by the Illinois State University experience where a state education labor relations board hearing lasted months with three unions and the central administration arguing for what they

thought the appropriate organizing unit should be.

The concept of multilateralism also applies to organizing because several parties are in a position to impose costs on the two principle parties. Students can choose to go elsewhere, legislators and state executive officials can cut budgets, and local governments and community interest groups can impose political costs. The interests of third parties arise from their needs in terms of their investments in the university as taxpayers or taxpayer representatives, their political and social needs, and in terms of their needs as users of the university. The application of research in multilateral bargaining to organizing is valid because the relationships and interests of the various parties are analogous and multilateral organizing situations could be forerunners of multilateral bargaining situations.

PUBLICS

Internal publics are groups internal to the campus who meet Newsom and Scott's (1985, p. 503) definition, "Any group of people tied together by some common bond of interest or concern." There are two categories of internal publics with which the union is concerned, those whom it is hoped will be in the union when the

campaign reaches its conclusion, mostly faculty and professional staff, and those who, while still being a part of the university, are expected to be outside the union when the campaign reaches its conclusion, mostly students, administrators, non-professional staff, and campus media. The public which the union hopes to recruit will be referred to as the target public.

Target Public

The target public is not heterogeneous. Faculty and academic staff vary in their attitude toward unions, with some patterns fairly well established. Faculty of higher rank and those who receive higher pay, including those in higher paying departments, are less likely to support the union (Dayal, 1982; Garbarino, 1975; Lawler, 1982), On the other hand, faculty in public schools, those undergoing major organizational change, and schools of education are more likely to support unions (Garbarino, 1975; Lawler, 1982). One study has specifically reported that "institutions in which bureaucratic decision making dominates collegial decision making have been most prone to unionization (Lawler, 1982). Therefore, persuasive communications must be tailored for specific sub-groups within the target public and must address

concerns unique to the campus experience of the target public.

Within the target public can be those who see themselves as oppressed workers because the ratio of their outcomes to inputs does not equal the ratio of outcomes to inputs enjoyed by others (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1979). Those who feel they are lacking in sufficient shared governance authority (Garbarino, 1980). Those who are unable to trust the decision making of the administration (Hammer & Berman, 1981; Walker & Lawler, 1979). Those who feel they need more in the way of bread and butter issues (Bigoness, 1978; Driscoll, 1976; Ladd & Lipsett, 1973), and many more.

The target public is also not composed of the same groups of personnel in all campaigns. From campus to campus, and from union to union, different groups are targeted for recruitment, in part because of differences in state labor laws and in part because of strategic considerations of one party or the other.

Other Internal Publics

Other important internal publics include administrators, students, and the rest of the staff and employees. So great is the number of distinctions between faculty, staff, and other employees that one

school which "met with any and all organizations which claim to represent employees and staff" found itself meeting with 40 organizations on one campus alone (Garbarino, et al. 1974).

Students represent an important interest in faculty organizing attempts, and have shown themselves to be conscious of their interests. During the faculty organizing drive at the University of Washington for example, students organized and demanded a large voice in any faculty bargaining system which emerged, up to and including full trilateral bargaining rights (Garbarino et al. 1974).

External Publics

The list of external publics is long. However, three groups of publics have considerable interests in campus organizing drives and have the potential to influence such drives; (a) those with monetary interests in the university, (b) those with political interests in the university, (c) those with a consumer interest in the university.

The public with monetary interest in the university may feel an organizing drive threatens them either through reduction of the value of something they

have already invested in or through increased costs to maintain their investment. This public is composed principally of taxpayers, alumni who contribute to the university, and politicians who must juggle limited state budgets. Also included are graduates who perceive a monetary interest in the reputation of the institution which granted their degree, and others.

The public with political interests in the university includes state and local politicians, graduates who perceive the reputation or prestige of their degrees as threatened by "unprofessional" conduct by their old instructors, and those with personal political views in support of, or opposed to, unions, including professionals who feel their professional status may be hurt or enhanced by a successful organizing drive. This public is concerned with what a successful organizing effort may mean for them politically or in terms of prestige.

The external public with a consumer interest in the university includes potential students, parents of current students, some businesses and corporations, and anyone who perceives the university as providing them with some service (such as concerts, sports events, research facilities, etc.) which might be denied, diminished, or enhanced, by a successful organizing

drive. This public is largely concerned with the continuation of particular services.

The general public, in their role as electors and taxpayers, make up the bulk of each of the significant external publics and their support or opposition can be crucial to the success of either side. Therefore, the way they perceive the organizing drive, its fairness and desirability, are necessary considerations for the union in all of its appeals, both to external publics directly and to internal publics. The union's appeals to its target public on the issue of wages for example may cause injury to the drive if already financially hard pressed taxpayers perceive the threat of higher taxes in that appeal. The union cannot hope to achieve success simply by appealing strongly to internal audiences, but must always concern itself with the potential interaction between its publics.

Elected politicians are also particularly important to campus organizing drives for two reasons. First, because they are directly responsible for funding most universities and for laws, such as the state labor laws referred to above, which can greatly influence the success or failure of a drive. Some politicians may impose their own views of faculty unions on the situation, while others may take, or not

take, actions designed to cover their own political flanks with the general public in their role as electors. Second, elected politicians represent the first step in the classic two step flow in which electors may well partially determine their own attitude toward campus organizing on the basis of how elected politicians, functioning as opinion leaders, respond to the drive.

In the above example one external public, state level politicians, interacts with, influences, and is influenced by, another external public, the electors. Additionally, the interaction of these two external publics might be influenced by the conduct of the union toward its target public if, for example, the union felt constrained to appeal to a particularly disenchanted group of faculty with a "militant" campaign which generated a backlash from both the state legislators and the electors.

CONCLUSION

The nature and limitations of appeals which are made in campus union organizing drives can best be understood when the pressures of answering to a plethora of publics, and their interactions, are taken into consideration. Both the administration and the

union advocates are faced with a common interest in not doing any permanent damage to the reputation or credibility of their institution while at the same time forcefully stating the cases for their respective audiences. Students share in the need to present and defend their current interests without damaging their own long term interests.

Because the universities under discussion are publicly financed, serve the general public, and are overseen by politicians, many powerful sectors of society perceive their interests as being affected by campus organizing drives. The interplay of forces, in the public spotlight, which characterize multilateral organizing campaigns as well as multilateral bargaining, may provide a learning situation for public relations practitioners who must conduct campaigns intended to influence specific internal audiences and the general public in such arenas as; electoral politics, community fundraising, millage, and others.

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